

FOLLOWING THE IMPLEMENTATION STEPS OF THE REGIONAL ACTION FRAMEWORK

The significant progress made over the past decade in implementing the Regional Action Framework has been driven by the collective and targeted actions of Governments across Asia and the Pacific. These Governments have undertaken institutional and legal reforms, improved business processes and invested in capacity-building and digitalized systems. Legal and regulatory reforms are highlighted in box 10. Achieving the ambitious vision of the CRVS Decade has required proactive strategies tailored to each country's context, strong political commitment to prioritize CRVS as a national development imperative and sustained collaboration, backed by the necessary financial and technical resources to modernize and strengthen CRVS systems. To support these efforts, the Regional Action Framework outlines eight implementation steps, which members and associate members committed to take and have increasingly completed during the CRVS Decade. While some steps—such as setting national targets and appointing national CRVS focal points—have been widely completed, several critical areas still require further attention to ensure full and effective implementation of the Framework.

BOX 10

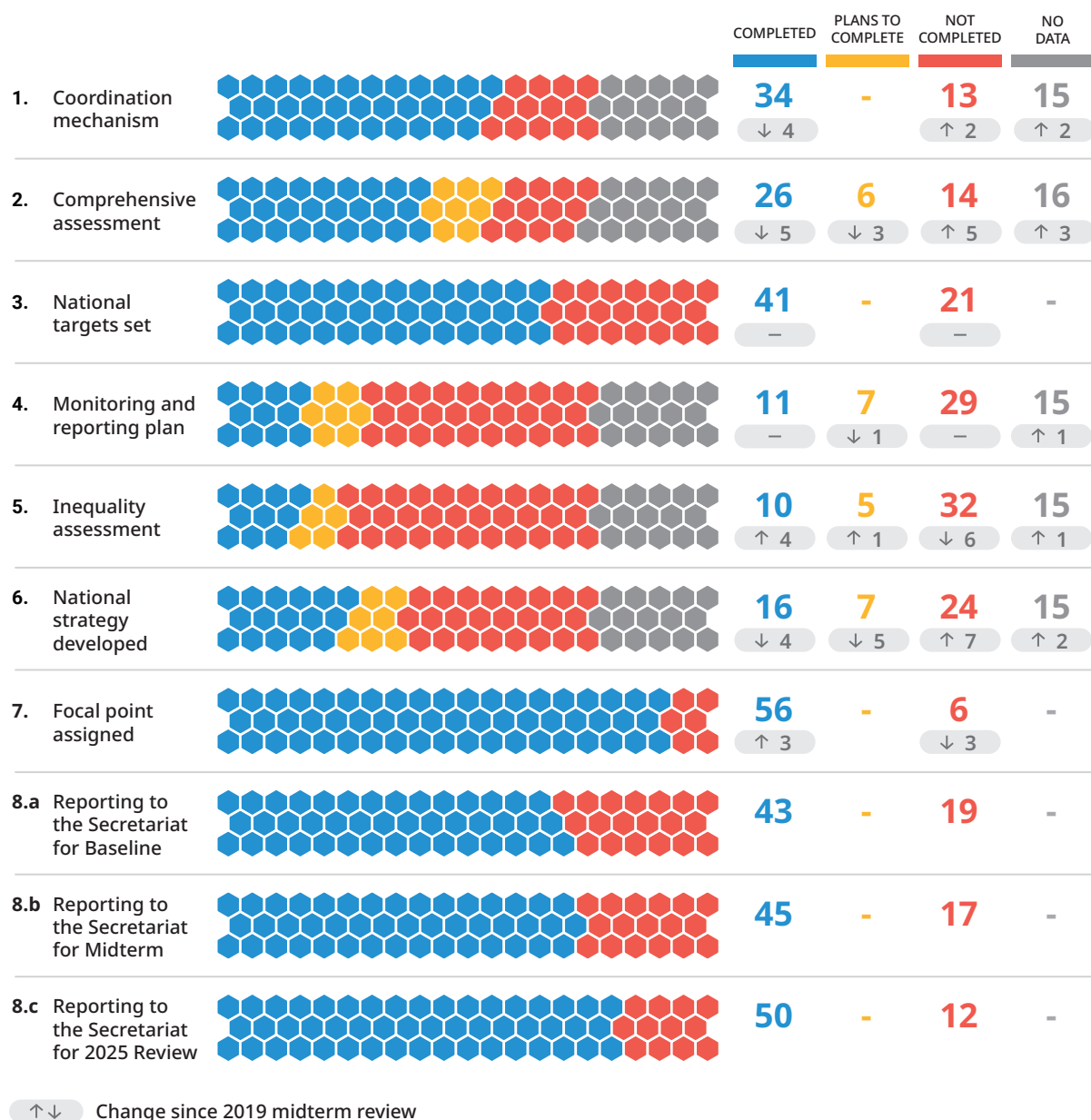
ESTABLISHING ENABLING LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENTS FOR CRVS IMPROVEMENT IN CAMBODIA AND THE PHILIPPINES

A well-functioning CRVS and identity management (CRVSID) system depends on a strong legal framework to ensure completeness, accuracy and universality. The Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAi) provides legal technical assistance on CRVSID laws, which includes a systematic and methodological approach to [reviewing countries' CRVS legal frameworks](#), using a [structured toolkit](#) based on United Nations guidelines and international standards. Working with Governments, the review provides a comprehensive gap analysis, addressing legislative barriers and opportunities for improvement. GHAi has assisted 11 members and associate members of ESCAP with legal reviews and legal reform work.

In the Philippines, the legal review highlighted the need for a series of improvements to the law as well as the lack of a clear legal framework for medico-legal death investigations (MLDI). This absence contributed to fragmentation across agencies and

overlapping jurisdictions. In response, GHAi assisted the Department of Health to draft an administrative order and joint circular to address those issues. Additionally, over the course of three years, GHAi assisted with drafting an Omnibus CRVS law which is currently under review by the Philippine congress. The law, if adopted, will allow systems to be digitalized, processes to be streamlined, fees to be removed, access to be improved and responsibilities to be clarified.

In Cambodia, where no CRVS-specific law existed, GHAi assisted the Government to draft a new comprehensive CRVSID law, which was adopted in July 2023, and to implement regulations. This law establishes an integrated identity ecosystem, linking civil registration, identity registration and residence registration to a population register. It also simplifies registration processes, designates the health sector as a notifier of births and deaths, and strengthens privacy protections for personal data.



Note: In all, 35 members and associate members responded to the baseline questionnaires on time. Eight responded late, and while their data were not included in the baseline report, their questionnaires were published on the website <https://getinthepicture.org>.

National coordination mechanism

A well-functioning CRVS system depends on strong coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders at both national and subnational levels. Over the past decade, multisectoral engagement—involving civil registration authorities, health ministries and national statistical offices—has been a driving force behind systematic improvements in CRVS across Asia and the Pacific. Many members and associate members have established effective inter-agency cooperation by integrating systems and processes across multiple government departments and agencies, resulting in more cohesive and well-coordinated CRVS operation. However, challenges remain with others still in the process of formalizing these partnerships by developing clear structures, policies and frameworks to ensure sustained collaboration. By 2024, 34 members and associate members of ESCAP had established national coordination mechanisms, aimed at streamlining

decision-making and policy implementation. However, 13 members and associate members have not yet introduced such mechanisms. Another 15 members and associate members did not provide information on their coordination structures. This includes some where their systems are perceived as very well-functioning and consequently they have not established such formalized coordination structures. Examples of efforts to improve CRVS processes are provided in box 11 and box 12.

BOX 11

CRVS SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

The CRVS Systems Improvement Framework is a practical tool to support the holistic strengthening of CRVS systems, including establishing or strengthening connections with national identification management systems. It guides countries through a structured process to assess current system performance, identify gaps and develop strategic and action plans—using a process-centric, results-oriented and human rights-based approach. Since the release of version 1 in 2021, the Framework has been applied in several countries globally, with most countries focusing on stage 1 (Assessment, Analysis and Redesign).

In Maldives, national stakeholders reviewed birth and death registration processes to identify gaps and determine areas for improvement. Findings were used to strengthen its digital birth and death registration platform, known as GEMEN, including linking it with the national identity card platform to accelerate the birth registration process and standardizing the cause of death field in GEMEN to improve the quality of mortality data in the system.

Findings from applying the Framework in Niue informed the development of a digital civil registration platform to replace the current paper-based system, enabling more secure and efficient processing and storage of registration data.

In Turkmenistan, the assessment identified client-facing challenges, including long wait times and the inability to book appointments online. Several

system redesign recommendations were put forward, including developing a digital registration platform with electronic forms to simplify the registration process and introducing SMS notification system, enabling efficient communication between the public and registry offices.

The Framework can be applied in a flexible manner – scaled up or down – depending on the needs of the local system. In Cambodia and Nepal, for example, where comprehensive legislative reviews had recently been conducted, local partners implemented a scaled down version of the Framework, ensuring that recommendations focused on actionable improvements within the new legal frameworks. In countries such as Bhutan and Viet Nam, the Framework was used to comprehensively review the system and develop strategies and action plans. An updated version of the framework is being developed.



BOX 12

CRVS BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENT TO STREAMLINE BIRTH REGISTRATION IN TIMOR-LESTE

The mountainous terrain of Timor-Leste poses challenges to achieving universal birth registration, particularly for hard-to-reach populations. Recognizing these barriers, the Government has committed to making the birth registration process more inclusive and accessible. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been working closely with the Government to streamline the birth registration process in Timor-Leste. The new process is user-centric and involves local stakeholders, namely midwives and village leaders.

Pregnant women visiting hospitals receive a 'mother-child booklet,' a comprehensive guide containing information on infant care, nutrition and a designated section for birth registration details. At the time of delivery, the attending midwife completes a birth registration form in duplicate. One copy remains with the family, while the midwife brings the other to the local health centre. For births occurring

in healthcare facilities, birth certificates are prepared in advance and handed to mothers when they bring their infants for their week-six immunization appointment. This initiative has significantly increased birth registration rates with 13,343 birth certificates issued in the province of Ermera under this system. Between 2018 and 2022, certified births in the province rose from 27,313 to 95,504.

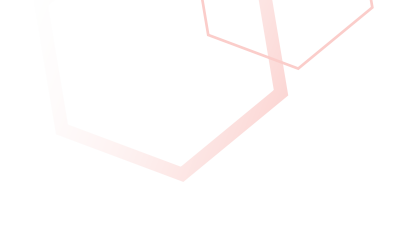
For births not attended by a midwife, families can notify the village leader who will in turn provide them with an additional birth registration template and facilitate registration of the child's birth at the notary office. By combining local practices and innovations in business process improvement, this alternative pathway integrates birth registration into maternal and childcare services and leverages first points of contact such as midwives or village leaders to ensure that no child is left without registration.

Regional collaboration

Beyond national-level efforts, regional collaboration has played a significant role in strengthening CRVS systems by fostering knowledge exchange, capacity-building and technical support. The Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Partnership have provided valuable platforms for fostering knowledge exchange, capacitybuilding and technical assistance. Regular meetings have enabled coordinated activities, and planning these platforms has accelerated progress toward achieving the goals and targets under the Regional Action Framework. In addition, subregional networks, including the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, the South-East Asia Civil Registration Professionals Network and the Civil Registration Professionals of South Asia (CR8) – have facilitated targeted interventions and peer-to-peer exchanges and learning, enabling context-specific solutions to be developed for common subregional challenges.

Standards-based comprehensive assessment

A standards-based comprehensive assessment can be a useful tool to identify gaps and challenges within the CRVS system. Since the launch of the Regional Action Framework in 2014, members and associate members have increasingly adopted more comprehensive sophisticated tools and methodologies to evaluate and improve their CRVS systems. Initially, assessment tools developed by World Health Organization and the University of Queensland School of Public Health were widely used. However, as CRVS systems evolved, additional tools and guidelines—such as the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Improvement Framework—have been introduced. Assessments typically examine business processes, the legal framework, measure registration completeness and coverage, evaluate registration procedures and assess cause-of-death coding practices, and may examine data quality.



As a critical step in strategy development, assessments should actively engage all relevant stakeholders through the national coordination mechanism to ensure an inclusive and effective approach to system improvement. Over the past decade, 26 members and associate members have conducted comprehensive assessments, with six more planning to do so. However, 14 members and associate members have yet to initiate these assessments, while data is unavailable for 16 others. Applying these new standardized methodologies has helped streamline registration processes and address inefficiencies.

Inequality assessment

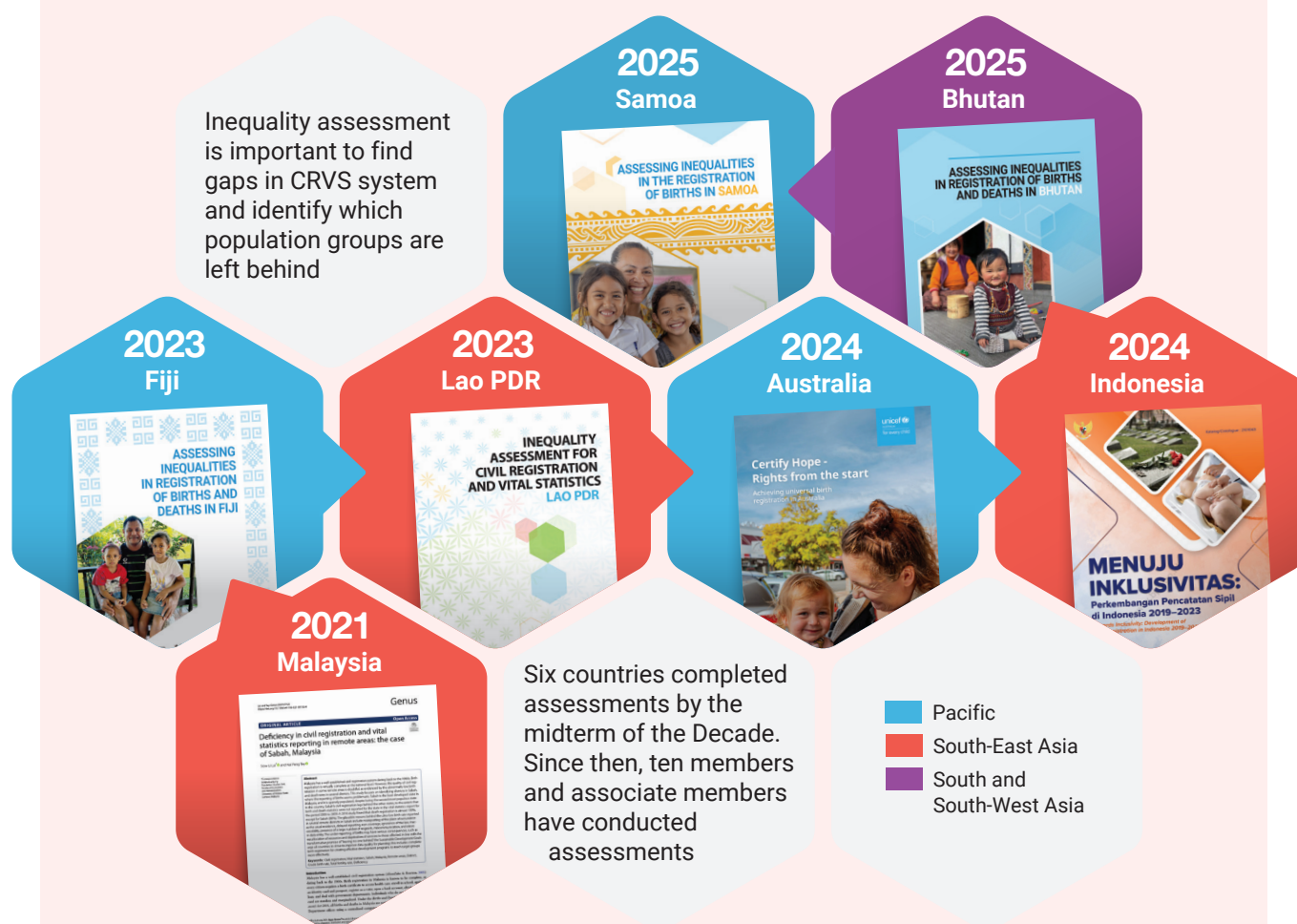
The Regional Action Framework commits ESCAP members and associate members to assessing inequalities, particularly for hard-to-reach or marginalized populations. This commitment acknowledges that assessments are needed in order to achieve inclusive and equitable registration coverage and completeness, and this implementation step is crucial in the path towards the regional goal of universal civil registration. Recognizing the need to accelerate the implementation of this step, the Ministerial Declaration on Building a More Resilient Future with Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics emphasized the urgent need to tackle disparities affecting hard-to-reach populations and people in vulnerable situations, including people living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons, domestic workers, persons with disabilities, foundlings and persons without documentation, among others. Despite this high-level commitment, progress has been slow in systematically identifying and addressing these disparities and there remains a lack of information on inequalities experienced by some populations. As of the latest review, only 10 members and associate members have completed an inequality assessment, five are planning to do so and 32 have yet to initiate one. To bridge these gaps, members and associate members are encouraged to establish targets to ensure universal and equitable registration coverage and completeness and legal documentation provision for all population groups. The assessments can support developing evidence-informed policies and interventions aimed at increasing registration rates among hard to reach and marginalized populations. Box 13 highlights key findings from inequality assessments conducted by members and associate members, including registration disparities based on age, wealth and residence.

Multisectoral national strategy

A well-coordinated, multisectoral approach is essential for achieving universal and responsive CRVS. A national strategy with clear goals, priorities and delineation of responsibilities transforms ad hoc efforts into systematic, high-impact actions while guiding development partners in providing relevant support. A comprehensive CRVS strategy should include a detailed work plan, clearly defined responsibilities and a properly resourced budget to effectively address gaps identified through assessments. It should also have measurable goals, targets and timelines, ideally aligning national priorities with international and regional commitments such as the Regional Action Framework as well as integration of civil registration, health and statistical systems to enhance service delivery and data availability and use. Examples from the region are provided in box 14. By 2024, 16 members and associate members had developed a CRVS strategy, with an additional seven planning to do so; however, 39 still lacked a dedicated strategy or did not provide data (see figure XI).

BOX 13

ASSESSING INEQUALITIES TO GET EVERY ONE IN THE PICTURE



While significant strides have been made to strengthen CRVS systems, inequalities persist. Across Asia and the Pacific, hard-to-reach and marginalized communities, including rural populations, ethnic minorities, displaced individuals and non-citizens, may face significant challenges in accessing civil registration services. Geographic isolation, socioeconomic barriers, administrative barriers and systemic discrimination contribute to underregistration. For instance, remote areas may suffer from a lack of infrastructure and limited government presence, while urban informal settlements may suffer from bureaucracy and documentation challenges.

The Regional Action Framework calls on members and associate members of ESCAP to assess inequalities in civil registration, because identifying disparities by age,

gender, location, ethnicity, or disability is key to pinpoint gaps in registration and inclusive policies to ensure no one is left behind. As of the 2025 review, 10 members and associate members had completed such assessments—up from six in 2019—highlighting progress in recognizing and addressing disparities.

Multiple tools, guidelines and frameworks have been developed to support inequality assessments, including one using secondary data developed by ESCAP. This framework facilitates the use of household surveys, census data and administrative sources to estimate completeness across population groups. The approach emphasizes collaboration between data producers and users and depends on a minimally functioning data ecosystem.

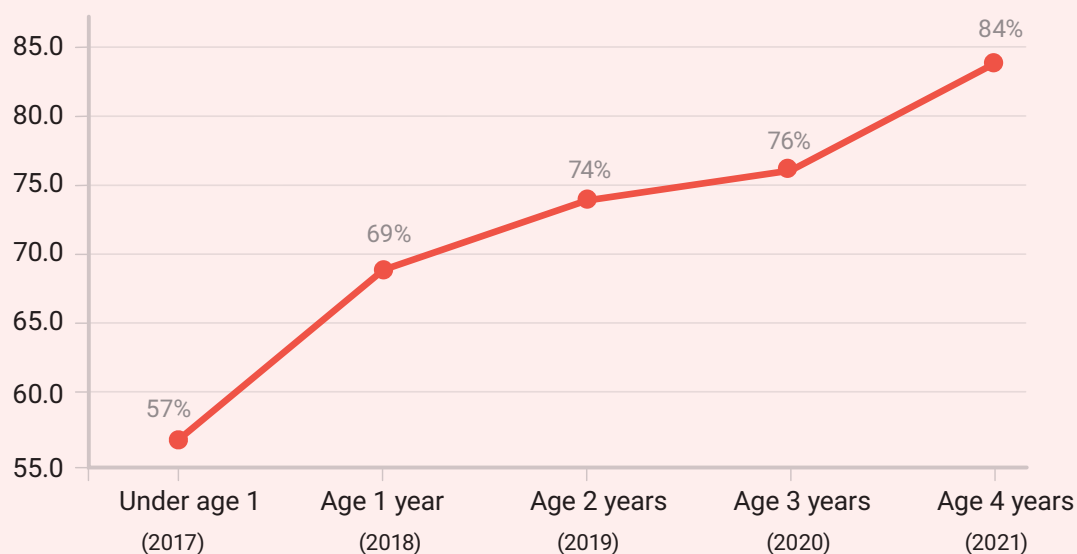
BOX 13 continued

ASSESSING INEQUALITIES TO GET EVERY ONE IN THE PICTURE

Using this framework, ESCAP has supported eight members and associate members in conducting inequality assessments. This technical assistance includes training national statistical offices and fostering policy dialogue to ensure findings inform national strategies. Some examples of findings emerging from these assessments include:

1. In Fiji, younger mothers under age 19 had the lowest birth registration rates. Additionally, male deaths were more likely to be registered than female deaths. Birth registration increased with age. More than half of children had their birth registered by their first birthday. The registration rate rose to 84 per cent for the same cohort of children when they turned four years old (see graph).
2. In Bangladesh, significant inequalities in birth registration were found, particularly linked to education, wealth and place of residence.
3. The assessment in the Lao People's Democratic Republic identified disparities in birth registration based on household wealth and residence.
4. The assessment in Bhutan emphasized the need to incentivize the registration of deaths among young children due to lower registration rates.
5. In Indonesia, an ecological analysis revealed that regions with higher unemployment, informal labour and poverty had lower death registration rates.

Birth registration completeness for the cohort of children age 0 in the 2017 census, Fiji.



Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Health and Medical Services and Ministry of Justice (2023)
[Assessing inequalities in registration of births and deaths in Fiji.](#)

Monitoring and reporting plan

Structured monitoring and reporting frameworks are important for tracking progress, identifying bottlenecks and implementing targeted interventions (see box 15 for examples from the region). Without a well-defined monitoring and reporting mechanism, CRVS systems risk stagnation, inefficiency and persistent gaps in coverage and completeness. While 11 members and associate members have established such mechanisms and seven intend to, 29 remain without, and 15 did not provide information.

BOX 14

DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE MULTISECTORAL NATIONAL CRVS STRATEGIES: EXAMPLES FROM BANGLADESH, CAMBODIA, INDONESIA AND VIET NAM

In collaboration with national stakeholders, Vital Strategies provided technical assistance to implement and/or assess each country's national CRVS strategic plan—including the CRVS National Action Plan in Viet Nam, STRANAS in Indonesia and the National Strategic Plan for Improvement in Cambodia. These efforts have been instrumental in monitoring progress, identifying gaps and capturing lessons learned, enabling the assessment of achievements and challenges in building inclusive, effective and resilient CRVS systems.

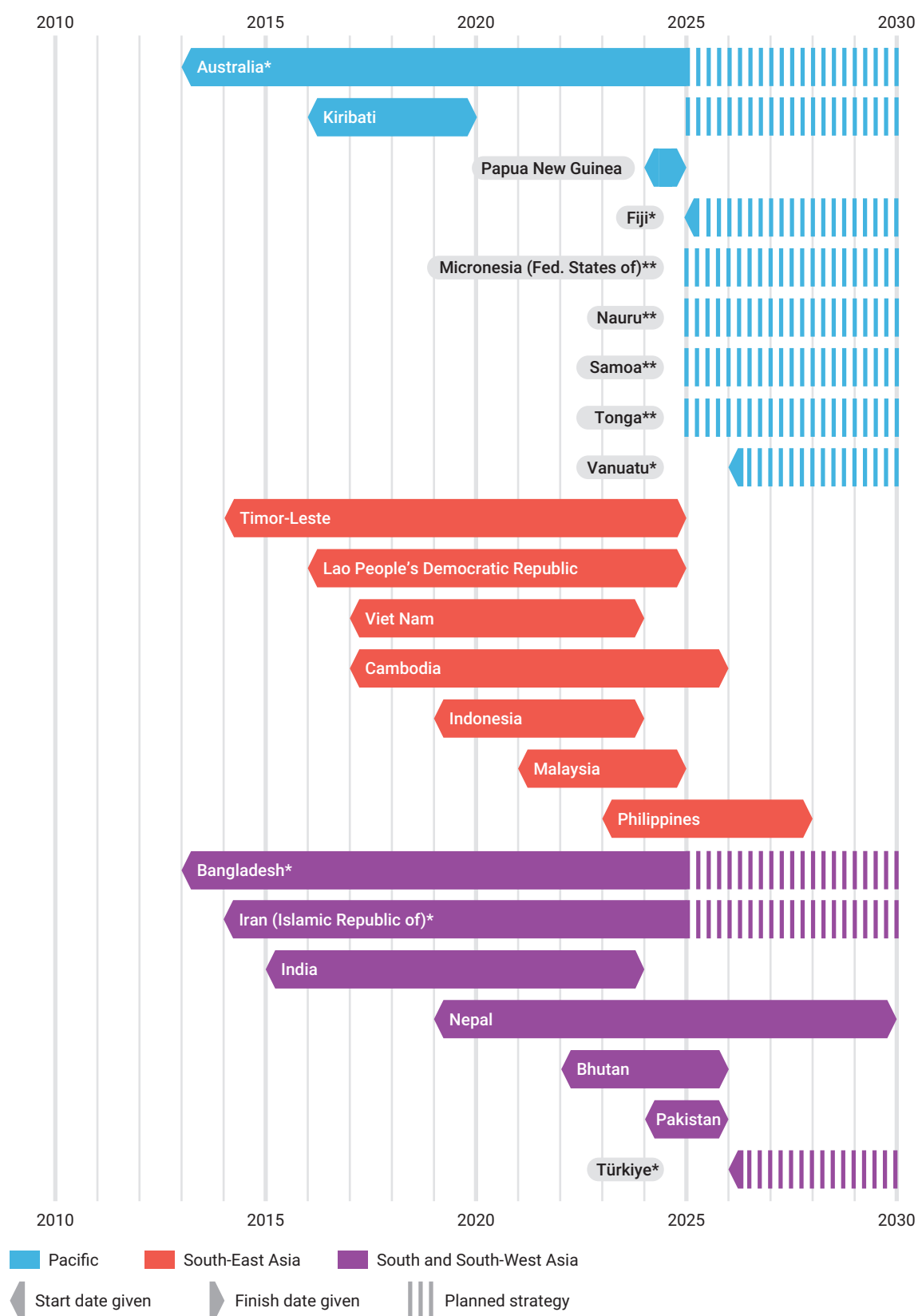
At the core of these efforts are key CRVS principles such as universality, permanence, continuity, confidentiality and accessibility. Ensuring that every birth and death is registered, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, is fundamental to guaranteeing legal identity, protecting individual rights and enabling access to services. Moreover, accurate and timely vital statistics are critical for public health planning, social protection programmes and good governance.

Vital Strategies also supported countries in applying the CRVS Systems Improvement Framework to assess the performance of existing birth and death registration processes. These assessments have informed the

re-design of CRVS processes and the formulation of forward-looking strategic plans. As the CRVS Decade (2015–2024) concludes, Vital Strategies is working closely with partners in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam to develop new national CRVS strategic plans. These government-led, evidence-based strategies provide a long-term road map for integrating CRVS system strengthening into national development priorities, fostering multisectoral coordination and ensuring sustained investment in infrastructure, capacity-building and innovation. By embedding CRVS improvements into national systems, countries will be better positioned to deliver equitable services, generate quality data and uphold the rights of all individuals.

The development of comprehensive and evidence-based national strategic plans is essential to institutionalize and sustain CRVS improvements. These plans provide a long-term, government-led road map that aligns CRVS system strengthening with broader development goals. They also foster multisectoral coordination, establish clear roles and responsibilities and enable sustained investment in infrastructure, capacity-building and innovation.

Figure XI: Time frame of comprehensive multisectoral national strategies



Members and associate members without a National Strategy or without available data: 39

* Members and associate members that have reported a development date but no timeframe

** Members and associate members that are planning to implement a strategy but have not established a timeframe

BOX 15

CRVS SYSTEM STRENGTHENING THROUGH MONITORING AND EVALUATION: CASES OF BANGLADESH AND SRI LANKA

Establishing strong routine monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms is essential to ensure the performance of CRVS systems. Effective M&E enables adherence to fundamental principles of CRVS: universality, continuity, permanence, confidentiality, compulsion, and timeliness. By embedding these principles into M&E practices, countries can ensure that CRVS systems produce high-quality, actionable data that informs public policy, enhances service delivery, and protects individual rights.

In Sri Lanka, Vital Strategies supported the development of Digital Monitoring for Data-Driven Governance. In March 2023, Sri Lanka launched the Monitoring and Evaluation System for Mortality Statistics (M&E MS) nationwide, revolutionizing its approach to mortality data collection and its monitoring. The system represents a pivotal step in transitioning from a paper-based data collection process to a digitally enabled, data-driven CRVS system. Despite historically high rates of birth and death registration in Sri Lanka, delays and inconsistent data quality previously limited the system's effectiveness – particularly with regards to centralizing records and use of data for vital statistics. The M&E MS introduces built-in quality assurance features and interactive data dashboards, allowing real-time identification of data gaps and facilitating evidence-based decision-making. Integrated into the Ministry of Health and the Registrar General's Department, the system has already enabled significant improvements: (1) optimized resource allocation through post-mortem examination data; (2) inquest tracking for informed deployment of Inquirers into Sudden Deaths; (3) assessment of cause of death data quality, leading to targeted certifier training; and

(4) district-level feedback mechanisms to improve medical certification of cause of death practices. Looking ahead, the Government of Sri Lanka plans to transition fully to digital death records by 2025 with integration of civil registration into the local digital public infrastructure, enhance physical infrastructure and human capacity, and implement ICD coding to further strengthen mortality data for comprehensive policy development.

In Bangladesh, CRVS was embedded into government accountability mechanisms. The Government took a performance-driven approach to improving CRVS through the annual performance agreement (APA)—a legally binding framework that sets out goals, indicators and targets across government agencies. Since July 2021, CRVS-related metrics have been included in APA, embedding accountability for timely and accurate birth and death registration at all administrative levels. Prior to APA implementation, only 11 per cent of births and 23 per cent of deaths were registered within one year. By March 2023, these figures had climbed to 83 per cent and 65 per cent, respectively—a major achievement toward the goal of registration completeness. These gains were supported by: (1) the development and rollout of an improved standard operating procedure (SOP) for registration; (2) training and information sessions conducted in partnership with Vital Strategies; and (3) efforts to reduce individual's burden by streamlining registration procedures and reducing repeat visits. The example from Bangladesh shows how integrating CRVS performance into national accountability systems can rapidly accelerate improvements in coverage and timeliness, contributing to a more effective and equitable CRVS system.

The 2025 review highlights mixed progress on implementation steps—significant advances have been made in some areas with most members and associate members having appointed CRVS focal points, set national targets and reported on their progress. However, major gaps remain in conducting inequality assessments, developing monitoring plans and comprehensive CRVS strategies. Strengthened coordination, technical assistance and political commitment are essential for advancing universal and well-functioning CRVS systems.



© Vital Strategies/Juan Arredondo